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2 May 2013

Mr John McParland
The Principal
The John Wallis Church of England Academy
Millbank Road
Ashford
TN23 3HG

Dear Mr McParland

No formal designation monitoring inspection of The John Wallis Church of England Academy- Primary phase of the Academy

Following my visit with Robin Hammerton, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 30 April and 1 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern. The focus of this inspection was the extent to which you are raising standards in the primary phase of the academy.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, Vice Principal (Head of Primary), three assistant principals and other members of staff. They also met with a group of pupils, three members of the governing body which included representatives of the sponsors, and a small number of parents. One parent also spoke to the lead inspector on the telephone. Observations of teaching and learning were carried out, some of which were together with members of the senior leadership team. The academy's record of recruitment checks of staff was also scrutinised.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

Context

The primary phase of the academy has 431 pupils on roll. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The remaining pupils come from a range of minority ethnic groups with the largest group being Gypsy/Roma. An above-average proportion speaks English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils included in the academy's register of special educational needs is higher than average, as is the proportion at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. Many pupils join the academy or leave it at various times through the year. A much larger-than-average number of pupils is known to be eligible for additional funding from the pupil premium.

The John Wallis Church of England Academy opened in September 2010, initially offering places to students in Years 7 to 11. A new sixth form opened in September 2011, admitting students into Year 12. The Primary phase of the Academy opened in September 2012, and is accommodated in the neighbouring predecessor school. The academy is sponsored by the Diocese of Canterbury, Kent County Council, Canterbury Christ Church University and Benenden School. The Vice Principal took up her post in April 2012, and a further three assistant principals took up their posts in September 2012. The proportion of teachers who have left or joined the Primary phase of the Academy since September is 38%. The recruitment of suitably qualified staff remains a challenge.

Achievement of pupils at the Primary phase of the Academy

Pupils' attainment remains below average throughout the Primary phase of the Academy. Academy data, information gathered from observations of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' books show that pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics has improved from that seen in the predecessor school. In all year groups, pupils now make consistently reasonable progress which is carefully tracked. However, this improving picture is not yet strong enough to redress historical underachievement, as progress is not yet rapid enough. In general, pupils make better progress, and attain more highly, in mathematics than in English.

Pupils read with enthusiasm and confidence, but attainment is below average. At Key Stage 1, pupils' knowledge and understanding of phonics is improving. Pupils read well in Year 6, but the reading books are not challenging enough to raise standards further.

The use of targets to aid pupils' learning is being developed and these targets are known by pupils. They are becoming increasingly more challenging, but teachers do not always use them to best effect when planning their lessons, which means that pupils' learning is slower than it might be.

Pupils entitled to the pupil premium achieve less well than others in the academy. Staff at the academy are aware of the need to sharpen their use of this funding.

Other groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, generally achieve as well as their peers.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children develop their social and concentration skills effectively through a range of interesting activities. As in other parts of the academy, other aspects of learning are less challenging and lead to lower levels of progress.

The quality of teaching

Inspection evidence and the academy's own records show that there is more to be done to make teaching more effective in the Primary phase of the academy. There are a number of positive features of teaching which are indicative of the success of academy leaders in bringing about improvement from the inadequate position at the time of inspection of the predecessor school. Positive features include a clear sense of purpose and a reasonable pace in lessons. Teachers explain clearly to pupils what is expected of them, and how they can be successful in their learning. However, teachers' expectations are often too low. Relationships between teachers and pupils are positive, and behaviour in lessons is generally well managed by teachers. Pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own learning and teachers' marking is regular and offers guidance on how pupils can improve the quality of their work.

The curriculum and content of lessons are appealing to pupils. Significant practical work and learning experiences outside of the classroom deepen their learning and motivate them. For example, a visit to a local wood by Reception class engaged children and quickly helped them to improve their vocabulary and understanding of plants and flowers.

The main barrier to more effective teaching in the Primary phase of the academy is the lack of challenge, and teachers not planning lessons to meet the needs of everyone in the class. Most of the time, the whole class does exactly the same, or very similar, work. Too often this work is not demanding enough and expectations of pupils are too low. Teachers are not always clear about how individual lessons or groups of lessons feed into a 'big picture' of where pupils need to be, or how much progress they need to make by the end of the term, year or key stage. The academy's increasingly ambitious targets for pupils and accurate assessments are not being used effectively to promote higher expectations, and to match the work to the needs of the pupils. Teachers' questioning skills do not always challenge the thinking of pupils. Outside of the classroom there is evidence to show that support for individual pupils and groups is having a positive impact on their learning.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage teacher-directed and child-initiated learning are all well established and managed. However, as in other years, these activities are not always demanding enough or carefully chosen to meet children's needs. Assessment of children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is thorough.

However, the contribution from additional adults in lessons is variable. Their support is often too general, rather than specifically working to help pupils achieve their targets. Nevertheless, they are often successful in helping groups of pupils to focus on the learning points in a lesson.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Inspectors witnessed largely positive attitudes towards learning when observing lessons. Pupils told inspectors that the recently introduced system used by teachers to manage behaviour in the classroom is having a positive impact. Pupils now realise that all actions have consequences, and the proportion of major behavioural incidents recorded by classroom teachers has started to fall. Not all teachers implement this new system consistently at present. Behaviour out of lessons has improved, but incidents still occur during lunchtimes and break about which some pupils express concern. Pupils reported that incidents of bullying still occur and disagreements between pupils can escalate. Leaders and managers have taken decisive action to deal firmly with serious incidents. Consequently, the proportion of pupils who are given fixed-term exclusions is higher than would be expected. Incidents of physical assault against other pupils and staff have occurred since the Primary phase of the academy opened in September, and account for over half of the incidents recorded. Many of the pupils face challenging personal circumstances and the appointment of a part-time behaviour consultant has provided much-needed support to enable pupils to discuss their problems and work towards modifying their behaviour.

Although pupils say bullying still exists, they also said they were confident that any incidents of bullying reported to members of staff would be dealt with. Assemblies have taken place to address safety issues and the school grounds are secure. Any issues relating to security of the internal school boundary identified by the inspection team were addressed immediately by the grounds staff. The academy's Christian ethos is shown through the care and support offered by all staff and their relentless drive to promote a harmonious and mutually supportive community.

Pupils' attendance remains below average compared to national averages. After a promising start in the first term and a drop in the attendance rate in the following term, partly due to illness, the attendance rate has not really recovered. The academy operates a system of telephone calls to parents and carers on the first day of absence, but this has not yet had the necessary impact in the Primary phase of the academy.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Self-evaluation is accurate and the Principal and Vice Principal have a clear understanding of what is required to secure school improvement. This is also clear from the academy's improvement plan which identifies appropriate strategies for

furthering academy improvement. The next phase of the plan for the coming academic year has taken on board the views of the primary academy staff. This contribution means that everyone has had an opportunity to identify current strengths, raise concerns and come up with ideas for improvement. This involvement of the whole academy community in planning for improvement is a common occurrence, and improvements made so far demonstrate leaders' capacity to sustain improvement. The new academy Primary senior leadership team works very well as a group and shares the vision that every pupil can succeed and is as important as the next, whatever their background. The Principal and Vice Principal have shared leadership of the Primary phase of the academy with the three assistant principals. Each of these maintains records of how well things are going within their year groups. This monitoring of pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching and behaviour and safety is used well to identify which initiatives are having an impact on raising standards.

Senior leaders have successfully managed to improve standards since the opening of the Primary phase of the academy, but they also acknowledge there is much more to be done. No inadequate teaching was seen during the inspection, and the academy's records of lesson observations show that this has been eradicated. Inspectors agreed with the judgements of the quality of teaching during lessons which were jointly observed with members of the Primary senior leadership team. However, too much teaching requires improvement because teachers' lessons target most pupils with the same work. Helpful assessment information on what pupils can, and should, achieve is not being put to best use. Senior leaders are attempting to rectify this by coaching teachers in the planning and delivery of their lessons, but this has yet to have enough impact to make teaching as effective as it should be. Nevertheless, some aspects of effective teaching are apparent; marking is mostly helpful, relationships between teachers and pupils are improving rapidly and teachers take every opportunity to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development both inside and outside the classroom. Senior leaders have taken decisive action to address teaching which is of too low a standard and plans are in place to improve the role of teaching assistants from September 2013 so that they are able to make a real difference to the achievement of those pupils whom they are supporting.

Members of the governing body challenge and support the academy's leaders well. They receive regular updates and reports on progress against the academy's priorities for improvement. The expertise within the governing body is used to good effect in order to hold the academy's leaders to account, and to broker support when required. Governors are rather less clear about how pupil premium funding is deployed and the impact it has on eligible pupils' outcomes. Senior leaders' deployment of these funds is not as sharply targeted as it might be, and the Primary phase of the academy has yet to narrow the gap in attainment between these pupils and others in the academy.

External support

The four sponsors of the academy each play a part in helping to raise standards. One important contribution is that of Canterbury Christ Church University who has carried out some valuable work with the special educational needs department in addressing the needs of pupils on the special educational needs register. They have also delivered training to teaching assistants to help them develop their role in the classroom. The Principal has also bought in additional valuable support in the form of a behaviour consultant and an educational psychologist. These specialists have worked successfully with a number of vulnerable pupils who are at risk of underachieving in the academy.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure all teaching meets the needs of different groups of pupils and raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Sharpen the focus on the way pupil premium funding is spent, and evaluate its impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Raise attendance so that it is at least in line with the national average.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Diocese of Canterbury and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell

Her Majesty's Inspector